

Wojcik to be Named Polish Heritage Society Citizen of the Year

By Teresa Bonham

The Polish Heritage Society is happy to announce the selection of Bob Wojcik, also known as “Wojo” by so many, as our 2025 Citizen of the Year.

Bob is the son of Polish immigrants who settled on the West Side of Grand Rapids with no other family in the area. Bob recalls that immediately, the other Polish families in the community became their local extended family.

This close community shared holidays and dinners with the Wojcik’s, providing the hospitality which is the embodiment of Polish culture.

His father died unexpectedly when Bob was 10 years old and, again the same community wrapped its arms around this



Bob Wojcik was selected as the PHS Citizen of the Year

young family to provide comfort and stability.

These life experiences are why he values and has a deep appreciation for his Polish heritage. Bob is a retired tool and die production supervisor and

has always had a passion for sports and giving back. He is a respected sports official with a history of working high school for 20 years as well as D2, D3, and MIAA collegiate basketball for 45 years.

He currently serves as a Lifetime Board member of the West Michigan Officials Association (WMOA) and heads Community Relations of the organization.

As the head of community relations, he oversees funds that are raised through memberships and donations to host camps for visually impaired youth and the purchase and placement of AED’s for schools and camps.

Bob considers this a wonderful opportunity for officials to give

back and possibly save the life of a student athlete, spectator or fellow official.

Bob is also a Lifetime member of the Polish Falcons as Wellness Director and awards grant requests from members to community organizations that are making a difference. In his church he is active in the St. Anthony Parish Time and Talent Initiative as well.

An interesting fun fact about Bob Wojcik is that he has visited every Major League Baseball stadium, some twice!!

Please join us at the Dozynki Polish Festival in Calder Plaza, Friday, Saturday, August 23 to celebrate Bob Wojcik as 2025 Polish Heritage Society’s Citizen of the Year.

Proud Polish-American Revitalizing Polish-Lithuanian Hall

By Richard Panek

A residential neighborhood one half block north of the American Seating Plant in Grand Rapids is the home of the Son’s and Daughter’s Club, a Polish-Lithuanian Hall.

The front façade of the historic building housing the club on Hamilton Avenue NW has a carved stone block above the front entrance with the words “Lyceum” and “Sons of Lithuania Aid Society”. On the front wall at street level, there is also a weathered cornerstone with the year 1912.

Andy Kosiorek is the current Son’s and Daughter’s Club president. He is not Lithuanian but is a proud Polish-American, who immigrated to America from communist Poland in 1967 at the age of 14. A retired facilities manager, he has been a member of the club for some years. Kosiorek explained that the word “Lyceum” on the façade reflects the hall’s early role as a cultural and educational gathering place.

In the early 20th century, many immigrant communities—especially those from



Andy Kosiorek

Eastern Europe—established lyceums as spaces for lectures, performances, debates, and civic engagement. The term itself harks back to the ancient

Greek school founded by Aristotle, and in the 19th and early 20th centuries, was the name used for institutions that promoted adult education and public discourse.

Established in 1912, Sons of Lithuania was one of two halls created to serve as a community anchor for Lithuanian immigrants seeking connection, cultural preservation, and mutual support. The building originally served not just as a social hall but also as their community lyceum, fostering cultural preservation

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Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids

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The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids promotes Polish/Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The Society meets on the 3rd Monday of every month except for December and general meetings in June and October. The society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to: phsgrandrapids@gmail.com

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and intellectual life among immigrants. Over time, as the community's needs shifted, the space evolved into the more relaxed social club it is today—but the name "Lyceum" remains etched in stone, a nod to its original mission.

Kosiorek said he wanted to use his talents and determination to help revitalize the organization. A member of the club since 2018, he joined the governing board in 2021. "It's taken a lot of effort, but we are making this a better club" he said. Under the current leadership, the club has experienced a renewed sense of purpose and community engagement.

Determined to honor the organization's roots while adapting to the needs of today's members, the club is looking to preserve the building's historic character while planning needed improvements. Restoration projects will include refurbishing the interior spaces to accommodate both traditional gatherings and new community events.

Besides prioritizing physical im-

provements in the club's physical facilities, they have expanded event programming and doubled membership over the last 2 years. The club holds regular billiard/



pool tournaments as well as other social activities including summer Friday Burger Nights in addition to Taco Nights. Kosiorek's close friend Marzanna Butryn also conducts the popular Polish Cooking class, supported by the Polish Heritage Society, at the club.

The Son's and Daughter's Club is, of course, a proud participant in Grand Rapids' annual Pulaski Days celebration, the citywide festival honoring the city's Polish and Lithuanian heritage.

One of the yearly highlights of the Club's activities is hosting the Scottville Clown Band for Pulaski Days. This year, they are performing on Friday, October 3 so mark your calendar and plan to attend. The Son's and Daughter's upstairs performance hall will be filled with joyful music played by professional musicians in full-clown costumes. Kosiorek said "The kids really like the zany antics of the clowns as they play."

Kosiorek's vision is not only to maintain the club's physical space but to invite a new generation to discover its rich legacy and further strengthen the club. Through member events, programs, and cultural collaborations with other organizations like the PHS, they are working to ensure that the club remains a lively gathering place where stories, traditions, and friendships are passed down through the years. To learn more about their events and membership information, check them out on their Facebook page or via email sons.daughtersgr@gmail.com

Grand Rapids Polish Classical Piano Recital a Hit

By Richard Panek

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids returned to its roots last month with the fine arts program, Polish Piano Legacy: Music of My Home performed by Polish pianist Cezary Karwowski at Saint Cecilia Music Center. The Polish Heritage Society, first founded in 1963 as the Polish Arts Society, originally promoted Polish culture through art exhibits, lectures, and similar music recitals. The goal then was to broaden the understanding of the contribution of Polish artists to culture in general. This concert

was another step, along with recent Detroit and Chicago Polonia bus trips, in renewing that type of cultural programming by the society.

The June 7th program attracted an audience of 120 to witness an evening of spectacular piano performance by one of Poland's leading young classical musicians. Born in 1998, Cezary Karwowski started playing the piano at 7 years of age. Mr. Karwowski was a recipient of scholarships from the Prime Minister of Poland and the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage as well as the

"Młoda Polska" (Young Poland) Scholarship thru the Karol Lipinski Academy of Music in Wroclaw, Poland.

Karwowski, who is studying for a Doctorate in piano performance at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, initially contacted the PHS about performing a year and half ago. With Karwowski's heavy academic schedule, it took some time to finalize the arrangements for the concert. In addition to the Doctorate,

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he is also studying for his second master's degree in fortepiano. The fortepiano also known as pianoforte, is the original instrument used by composers and performers in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Karwowski's academic and research interests in addition to fortepiano are in the study of Polish pianist Ignacy Paderewski who lived from 1860-1941. He is also actively researching the history and music of the Polish American composers Moritz Rosenthal, Leopold Godowsky, Josef Hofman and Ignaz Friedman. "I hope to bring these other artists the recognition they deserve because they were innovators in composition and performance. Most all Polish Americans know of Frederick Chopin and Ignacy Paderewski. I hope to introduce more people to the works of these Polish Americans as well." Karwowski said.

The performance took place in the Royce Auditorium of the Saint Cecilia Music Center

which was founded in 1888. In fact, it is quite likely that the artists Paderewski and Rozen-thal performed on the same historic stage since they both toured extensively. Grand Rapids Public Library Archives contain records of them performing in the city during the early 20th century.

Promotion of the event was a team effort with cultural ambassadors as well as board directors and members promoting, organizing and staging the production. Promotion to the general public was made possible by media partnerships with Blue Lake Public Radio WBLU 88.9 / WBLV 90.3 in Grand Rapids and Muskegon as well as Interlochen Public Radio. Main underwriting for the program was thru supporters Stephen and Jamie Kusmierczak, Richard and Mary Panek, Charlene Czarnecki, Gary and Mary Ann Mancewicz, Barbara Rylko-Bauer and John Theisen.

Ticket sales met expectations and people enjoyed the open post-recital dessert reception where the artist was able to meet and interact with the

attendees. The PHS used the Zeffy non-profit fundraising platform for promotion and ticket sales. One unique feature of Zeffy is that it allowed for follow-up thank you's to be emailed to ticket purchasers. Some replied to those emails with rave reviews for the performance. The following are some highlights:

"What a successful evening! It was phenomenal and his "lecture notes" enhanced the enjoyment of the beautiful music, especially regarding the lesser-known Polish American composers. With this concert, you raised up the PHS to another level....not just an "ethnic" organization but truly also a community-wide one."

"Mr. Karwowski was amazing. His wide range of tonality, touch, expression, musicality was impressive....as well as his technique of course. And he had a very warm, engaging presence which is not always the case with performers."

"I hope that the PHS can repeat this, perhaps next year. There are many more Chopin pieces

that we all would love to hear!"

"The performance last evening was thrilling and breathtaking in every way! "

Karwowski was very impressed with the acoustics of the auditorium as well as the warm welcome he received in Grand Rapids. He mentioned that the completion of his Doctorate includes a performance with the University Musical Society's Ann Arbor Symphony some time in the next two years. He is hoping that his new fans in Grand Rapids will attend that performance.



Cezary Karwowski with Rich Panek after the recital

PHS Dozynki Festival Entertainment and Activity Schedule for August 22-24

Friday, August 22, 2025

11 a.m. -- Festival Opens
12 p.m. -- American and Polish National Anthems
1-5 p.m. -- Recorded music by Polka Pops DJ Mike Boruta
5 p.m. -- Paczki Eating Contest
5:30 p.m.-- Food demonstration
6-10 p.m. -- Live Music by Tony Blazonczyk's New Phase & Jerry Kaminski's Polka Network
6:45-7 p.m. -- Intro to PHS Board
7 p.m. -- Introduction of Polish

Heritage Society Board

10 p.m. -- Festival Closes

Saturday, August 23, 2025

11 a.m. -- Festival opens
12 p.m. -- American and Polish National Anthems
12-4 p.m. -- Live Music by Virgil Baker & The Just for Fun Band
1-3 p.m. -- Children's Activities & Face Painting in the Char Czarnecki Children's Tent
1-4 p.m. -- West Catholic Robotics Demo
2 p.m. -- Lithuanian Dancers

3-4 p.m. -- Maria Bereza: Traditional Polanski Egg Decorating Demo

4:30 p.m. -- Paczki Eating Contest

5 p.m. -- Food Demonstration
6-10 p.m. -- Live Music by Gerry Kaminski's Polka Network

7:15 p.m. -- Presentation of the 2025 PHS Citizen of the Year

10 p.m. -- Festival Closes

Sunday, August 24, 2025

12 p.m. -- Festival Opens, American and Polish National Anthems

12-5 p.m. -- Live Music by the Bruce Packard Band

1-3 p.m. -- Children's Activities in the Char Czarnecki Children's Tent

1:30 p.m. -- Introduction to Busia Queen Contestants

1:45 p.m. -- Busia Queen Voting Begins

2-2:30 p.m. -- Malbork Dance Group Performance

2:30 p.m. -- Busia Queen Voting Ends

3 p.m. -- Busia Queen Crowning

5 p.m. -- Festival Ends



YES, We/I would like to be a 2025 Polish Dozynki Festival Sponsor!

- | | |
|--|---|
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Polish Heritage Society Membership News

By Marilyn Lignell

Lifetime member Rev. Tom Simons wrote to tell us that on May 1, during a pilgrimage to Rome for the Jubilee Year, he visited the Polish War Cemetery at Monte Cassino, about 80 miles southeast of Rome, which contains the graves of 1,072 Poles who died while storming the bombed Benedictine Monastery at the top of Monte Cassino, in May 1944.

He went on to say that the cemetery also has the grave of General Wladyslaw Anders, who commanded the Polish Forces that captured Monte Cassino from the Nazis. The

cemetery is the closest of all Allied cemeteries and symbolizes the importance of Polish fighters during the battle. It was the Poles that were credited with liberating the abbey from Axis forces. Their war dead were honored with being buried in such proximity to the structure for which they died liberating. The religious affiliation of the deceased are indicated by three types of headstones: Christian crosses for Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox and The Star of David for Jewish people's headstones. The cemetery is maintained by the Council for the Protection of Memorial Sites of

Struggle and Martyrdom.

Former PHS president and Dozynki Festival Chairman Jeffery Portko sends thanks to all PHS members who reached out to offer condolences and memorial notes after the passing of his wife Lynnette in October. He says he is doing well and has moved his Advocate Law office to 1515 Michigan Street NE in Grand Rapids.

Congratulations to lifetime member Emma and husband Hayden Latham on their wedding held in West Olive on the shore of Lake Michigan on June 7, 2025. We are also happy for Emma's mom and lifetime member Millie Combs on gaining another amazing son-in law!

The Polish Heritage Society would also like to welcome new member Patricia Fowler!

By the way, did you know that the PHS membership has grown 42% in the last 4 years? Lets keep the momentum going. If you know of anyone who would be interested in becoming a member, please invite them to join. Registration information is on the back of this newsletter. Strength in numbers makes for a strong organization.

Speaking of strength, our members are key to making our programming activities a success, whether it is the piano recital mentioned in this newsletter or our main yearly fundraiser, the Dozynki Polish Festival August 22-24(See schedule on page 3).

A great way to enjoy the Festival is to volunteer some hours to work before, during or after enjoying the festivities. Dozynki volunteers are needed for festival which is the longest continuously running ethnic fest in Grand Rapids. Go to the PHS website under festival/ volun-



Hayden and Emma Latham

teer to use the Sign-up Genius to pick the time that works best for you. Scheduled volunteers get free tokens that can be used to purchase food and drink at the festival so join the fun!

Upcoming PHS activities to attend and share with friends include the following:

Dozynki Festival Planning Meeting 6:00 pm Thursday, July 10th at Falcons.

Rozmowa Polish language club meeting on July 22nd at Kosciuszko Hall at 7:00 pm. Follow the PHS Facebook page for lesson topics to be posted before the meeting.

Matka Boska Zielna mass will be at 7:00 pm, August 14 at St. Isidore Church.

PHS Board meetings take place the 3rd Monday of every month at the Polish Falcons.

Marzanna Butryn still has October Tour of Poland spots available thru Classic Travel. For more information email:

butrynmazanna@gmail.com

margaret@classic-travel.com



Father Tom Simons on Pilgrimage in Italy visited the Monastery at Monte Cassino, site of a pivotal, Polish led victory in WW II.



Join the Polish Heritage Society to receive our monthly newsletter and other benefits!

Annual Student Membership for full-time students through college \$5

Annual Adult Membership \$20

Annual Family or Business Membership \$35

Lifetime Membership \$150



JOIN ONLINE

You can join the Polish Heritage Society online by scanning this QR Code:

BY MAIL

Fill out this form and send a personal check made out to the Polish Heritage Society to this address:

Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids

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